



# COMPETING GLOBAL VISIONS

The Clash of Civilizations *Revisited*

David Martin Jones

In the summer of 1993, Samuel Huntington published ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’ in *Foreign Affairs*. The product of an Olin Institute project on the changing American security environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the essay generated more debate than any article published by the journal since George Kennan wrote his famous, geopolitically informed essay on ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’ in the summer of 1947. This is not without significance, given that Huntington proposed an emerging world based not on Cold War ideological rivalry, material interests, or post-Cold War secular, liberal democratic values, but on culture.<sup>1</sup>

As Huntington wrote three years later, a constructive way of posing a question is to test a hypothesis, and given the controversy he had unleashed, he elaborated the hypothesis in a book-length answer to his original question in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). The book’s pessimistic view of the prospects for a universal, liberal institutional order promoting human rights, democracy, and global justice earned the ire of progressives everywhere. After 9/11, 2001, successive US presidents and UK prime ministers from Bush and Obama to Blair and Cameron went to great lengths to assure their national and international audiences that the War on Terror and the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had nothing to do with a civilizational clash between the West and Islam. What, we might wonder, almost forty years after Huntington first published his essay, was his thesis, and more pertinently, does it still hold?

Huntington was far more prescient in his prognostication of the shape of things to come than he perhaps could have anticipated, or than his academic critics across the Western academic world could, or would, give him credit for. Huntington’s clash thesis was a reaction to what would soon become the dominant progressive orthodoxy after 1990, namely Francis Fukuyama’s contention, which first appeared as an influential essay in *The National Interest* as ‘The End of History?’ (1989). Subsequently extrapolated into a book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Fukuyama contended that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet communism would lead in time to a universal, liberal, secular democratic order of





states.<sup>2</sup> The two hypotheses existed in dialectical opposition. Most Western liberals, progressives, and neo-conservatives assumed that the world was moving towards an interconnected and increasingly integrated world set in a golden straight jacket of open markets, the free movement of goods and people, democracy, and shared universal, if ultimately Western, norms of justice and human rights. Contra this vision, which informed the long wars of humanitarian intervention and which still clings to a regime of universal values, based on international law and institutions to oversee them, Huntington posed an inexorable clash.

The clash reflected the fact that at the end of the Cold War the West as a particular civilization had reached peak maturity. Seemingly on the brink of a golden age where the world's richest democracies, primarily located in the West, drove economic growth, technological innovation, and possessed the military capacity to overawe any potential competitor, the West, in fact, had quite suddenly shrunk. Its universalist assumptions faced an emerging challenge from civilizations primarily Sinic and Islamic, but possibly also Eurasian and Hindu, that evinced 'an exacerbation of civilizational, societal and ethnic self-consciousness'.<sup>3</sup>

The world was not unifying into a modernized, open, borderless world as Davos men like McKinsey analyst Kenichi Ohmae, Fukuyama, and Thomas Friedman maintained, but into something very different, namely into 'cultural identities, which at the broadest level are "civilization identities" that inform an evolving "pattern of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world"'.<sup>4</sup> Inhabiting 'a mirage of immortality' a purblind West failed to see that this brave new world was multicivilizational, in which different civilizations, as they acquired the West's technology and secured its manufacturing base, resented the drive to Westernize (aka democratize) their societies and adopt *soi-disant* liberal, universal, moral values.

Following Toynbee's earlier attempt to paint human history in civilizational terms, Huntington adopted the former's classification of four primary civilizational groupings outside the West, *viz.* Islam, Hindu, Orthodox/Eurasian, and Sinic.<sup>5</sup> These civilizations possessed distinctive values and visions and, as the world shrank and its interconnections grew, identity and culture would define difference both within and between civilizations at the expense of a liberal, integrative meliorism.

Writing in 1996, Huntington drew heavily upon the first Gulf War (1990–1991), the ongoing ethno-religious fragmentation of the Balkans, and the economic rise of China to support his argument. He posited that future war both within states and between them would occur along cultural fault lines between civilizations, as was the case in the former Yugoslavia. In this context, unlike many realists at the time,<sup>6</sup> he saw NATO's expansion in the 1990s, to embrace former Warsaw





Pact countries with a European Christian heritage from Poland and the Baltic states to Croatia, as an inevitable consequence of civilizational affiliation. 'The civilizational paradigm', he wrote, 'provides a clear-cut and compelling answer to the question confronting Europe (after the Cold War)', namely where does it end? It ends 'where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin'.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he recognized that Russia would, despite its historical divide between Westernizing and Russifying political factions, still exert a distinct civilizational presence in Eastern Europe and on its borders with the former Ottoman world, forming a bloc with an orthodox heartland under its leadership and a surrounding buffer of relatively weak Islamic states. Huntington also observed that the West's Eastern fault line ran through Ukraine, but did not anticipate it leading to internecine war. If 'civilization is what counts', he prognosticated, 'violence between Ukrainians and Russians is unlikely'.<sup>8</sup>

Division along cultural fault lines also reflected intensifying kin and religious group recognition and attachment suppressed, but never quashed, during the ideological Cold War. This 'syndrome' intensified identities and reified cultural distinctions both within and beyond often ethnically artificial state borders. Indeed, as people came to define themselves ethnically and confessionally, they increasingly perceived their relationships in dualist terms of 'us versus them'.<sup>9</sup>

This had become increasingly apparent not only in the case of the disintegrating former Yugoslavia, where McWorld confronted jihad,<sup>10</sup> but also in the initial 'transitional' civilizational post-Cold War conflict, namely the first Gulf War (1990–1991) that catalyze long-standing tensions between the West and the Muslim world. The invasion of Iraq saw the Islamic world drawing together against its Western infidel 'other'. The West against Islam, the Dean of Umm al Qura University in Mecca pontificated, demanded *La Revanche de Dieu* or in his case Allah. Even Shiite Iran, at war with Iraq less than a decade before, considered the invasion 'flagrant', legitimating a 'jihad' against 'American greed, plans and policies'.<sup>11</sup> This Islamic resurgence reflected a shared consciousness that could lead to greater cohesion in the Muslim world opposing a West that it had perennially been in conflict with since the seventh century. Indeed, 'as long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), fundamental conflict will continue to define the relationship'.<sup>12</sup>

Islam, however, possessed bloody borders, and unlike more industrially developed civilizations, it lacked a core state. This was not the case with Greater India and Greater China. China in particular functioned as a core state for an inchoate Sinic civilization. The rise of China and its bamboo network of overseas Chinese people, together with tiger economies like Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and its shared Confucian heritage with North and South Korea, prefigured the





emergence of 'a Greater Chinese co-prosperity sphere',<sup>13</sup> that would increasingly question America's role as the external balancer in the Asia–Pacific region. Even Taiwan and Beijing, Huntington thought, were moving ineluctably toward each other presaging 'integration over time'.<sup>14</sup>

In any event, the coming decades of Asian economic growth announcing the Asia–Pacific century would produce a massive shift in power between civilizations, inexorably destabilizing the Western-led, liberal international order. By 1996, Greater China was already 'an economic and cultural reality'. Since the nineteenth century, wealth, like power, has signified an assumed proof of virtue, a demonstration of moral and cultural superiority. As they became more successful economically, East Asians did not hesitate to assert the distinctiveness of their culture and trumpet its superiority.

The emergence of these greater political groupings in Eurasia, the Muslim world, China, and even Latin America indicated that culture really counted. Its platoons are tribes and ethnic groups, its regiments are nations, and its armies are civilizations. In such a civilizational world, states bandwagon with their core states and balance against civilizational threats. The emergence of these greater civilizational entities balancing or forming cultural alliances across the world continent intimated the emergence of what Carl Schmitt first identified as a multipolar, geopolitical world of contending *Grossraume* (great spaces).<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Schmitt, like Huntington, is an influential thinker in both Chinese and Russian policymaking circles. Schmitt notably envisaged a *telluric*, land-based challenge to the West's *thalassocratic* or sea-based universalism.<sup>16</sup>

States outside this framework of larger units faced internal and external challenges. Japan, a 'lone' cultural power in East Asia, had unsuccessfully formulated its version of the greater co-prosperity sphere in the 1940s and now faced difficulties in its relationships with China, Korea, and the US. So too, Huntington wrote, did states like Australia, Turkey, and Mexico, where an elite might want to identify with a different culture for economic or political reasons. Turkey's elite had been drawn to Western models since the 1920s, Mexico's political class was drawn to the US and, in the case of Australia under Paul Keating, there was the alluring possibility of Asian engagement, redefining the country as the latest Asian model. In these circumstances of burgeoning greater civilizational identities, such liminal states could become either 'torn', 'cleft', or both.<sup>17</sup>

In Huntington's definition, 'A *torn country* possessed a single predominant culture which places it in one civilization but its leaders want to shift to another.'<sup>18</sup> In such societies an elite chose an identity contrary to the inclinations and attachments of the masses. This schizophrenia also beset post-Soviet Russia, where elites and





masses seemed increasingly divided between a Westernizing democratic vision and a revanchist Orthodoxy that embraced a Eurasian heartland that subsequently informed an increasingly apocalyptic Putinism.<sup>19</sup>

Under civilizational constraints, moreover, core and non-core states could also become 'cleft'. Here large, increasingly migrant communities belong to different civilizations. In a cleft country, minority groups, and their host country find that 'the forces of repulsion drive them apart and they gravitate toward civilizational magnets in other societies'.<sup>20</sup> The divisive effect of civilizational fault lines was most visible in 'those countries held together during the Cold War by authoritarian communist regimes legitimated by Marxist–Leninist ideology'.<sup>21</sup> Yet these cleavages, Huntington observed, were also becoming a demographic feature of European and American states.

In 1996, this post-Cold War, multipolar, multicivilizational world evidently lacked an overwhelmingly dominant ideological cleavage as had existed in the Cold War. So long as the Muslim demographic and Asian economic surges continued, however, the conflicts between the West and the challenger civilizations would be more salient to global politics than other lines of cleavage. Islam and China embody great cultural traditions very different from and, in their eyes, infinitely superior to, those of the West. The power and assertiveness of both in relation to the West were increasing. The dynamism of Islam was the ongoing source of many relatively small fault-line wars; the rise of China was the potential source 'of a big intercivilizational war between core states'.<sup>22</sup>

Under these conditions, Huntington foresaw an evolving Confucian–Islamic interconnection. The cooperation between Muslim and Sinic societies opposing the West on weapons proliferation, human rights, and other issues prefigured this alliance. At its core were the close ties emerging between Pakistan, Iran, and China, crystallizing in the early 1990s into an 'embryonic alliance'. Today China's economic power, Richard Nixon observed in 1994, 'makes US lectures about human rights imprudent. Within a decade it will make them irrelevant. Within two decades it will make them laughable.'<sup>23</sup> Where in such a contentiously civilizational world, we might wonder, did this leave the West?

## THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

The West uniquely possessed two civilizational 'cores': the United States and, after 1990, a core Europe centred on France and Germany. Despite the notable success of the West in defeating communism and the enthusiasm of its progressive elites for its universal, secular, democratic values informing a rights-based and globally





just world order, Huntington identified a number of factors intimating inexorable Western decline. The symptoms were economic, institutional, demographic, technological, and military.<sup>24</sup> In 1950, the West produced 65 per cent of global GDP, but by 2020 that figure had almost halved. Quantitatively the West controlled less territory than it did in 1914, and represented a rapidly decreasing minority of the world's population. Meanwhile, Western military capacity, absent the United States, declined precipitously after the Cold War, with major European states consistently spending less than 2 per cent of their GDP on their armed forces.

At the same time, military capabilities, including weapons of mass destruction, were spreading across the world. In the post-Cold War world, the United States possessed unmatched conventional military power. However, by the 1990s, potential adversaries like Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan had, or would soon attain, nuclear weapons. Significantly, post-Soviet Russia emphasized the role of nuclear weapons in its defence planning and, in 1995, arranged to purchase additional intercontinental missiles and bombers from Ukraine. 'We are now hearing what we used to say about Russians in the 1950s', one US weapons expert commented. 'Now the Russians are saying: "We need nuclear weapons to compensate for their (US) conventional superiority."' <sup>25</sup> Rather than reinforce power politics as usual, Lawrence Freedman wrote, post-Cold War 'nuclear proliferation in fact confirmed a tendency towards the fragmentation of the international system in which the erstwhile great powers play a reduced role'.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, as countries developed economically, they generate the capacity to produce weapons. China rapidly expanded its force capabilities after 1990 and underwent a revolution in its military affairs. As Western hard and soft power declined, its ability to impose its values of human rights and democracy on other civilizations also dissipated, and so did the attractiveness of those values to other civilizations.

Progressive universalism posited that people throughout the world should and would embrace Western values, institutions, and culture because they embodied the highest, most enlightened, most liberal, most rational, most modern, and most civilized thinking of humankind. Yet, this was demonstrably not happening. Instead, a fading West and the rise of other power centres promoted global processes of indigenization and the resurgence of non-Western cultures and values. This process manifested itself in the revival of religion and most notably in the 'cultural resurgence in Asian and Islamic countries generated in large part by their economic and demographic dynamism'.<sup>27</sup>

Between 1965 and 1990, the total number of people on earth rose from 3.3 billion to 5.3 billion, an annual growth rate of 1.85 per cent. In Muslim societies,





growth rates were almost always above 2.0 per cent, often exceeded 2.5 per cent, and at times were over 3.0 per cent. Between 1965 and 1990, for instance, the Maghreb population increased at a rate of 2.65 per cent a year, from 29.8 million to 59 million. Along with population growth went the rise of Islamic fundamentalism among its youth. That threat, Huntington wrote, 'will persist well into the twenty-first century'.<sup>28</sup>

If demography is destiny, 'population movements are the motor of history'. In centuries past, differential growth rates, economic conditions, governmental policies, war, and disease produced massive population shifts. Nineteenth-century Europeans proved, however, the 'master culture at demographic invasion'.<sup>29</sup> Between 1821 and 1924, approximately 55 million Europeans migrated overseas, 34 million of them to the United States. Westerners conquered and, at times, obliterated other peoples, exploring and settling less densely populated lands. The export of people was perhaps the single most important dimension of the rise of the West between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

This trend reversed dramatically after 1945, when Europe and the US received massive infusions of often culturally very distinct peoples from the Middle East, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Whilst the West consistently opposed nuclear proliferation and supported democracy and human rights, its views on immigration, in contrast, have been ambivalent, with the balance shifting significantly in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

By the early 1990s, two thirds of the immigrants in Europe were Muslim, and European concern with immigration is above all concern with Muslim migration and integration. The challenge is demographic and cultural. Muslim communities, whether Turkish in Germany, Algerian in France, or South Asian in Britain, have not been integrated into their host cultures, and have evinced few signs of becoming so. There 'is a fear growing all across Europe', Jean-Marie Domenach wrote in 1991, 'of a Muslim community that cuts across European lines, a sort of thirteenth nation of the European Community' (at that time comprised of twelve member states).<sup>30</sup>

Migration becomes a self-reinforcing process. 'If there is a single "law in migration"', Myron Weiner wrote, 'it is that a migration flow, once begun, induces its own flow. Migrants enable their friends and relatives back home to migrate by providing them with information about how to migrate, resources to facilitate movement, and assistance in finding jobs and housing.'<sup>31</sup>

Sustained immigration produces divided communities. This phenomenon is evident, Huntington contended, in Europe, where a Muslim diaspora was, at





that time, only 'a small minority'. It was also manifest, in lesser degree, among Hispanics in the United States, who are a larger minority. If assimilation failed, 'the United States (would) become a cleft country'. Similarly, in Western Europe, migration together with the weakening of its central religious component, Christianity, threatened its cultural foundations. The result was an evolving global migration crisis felt most acutely and divisively after 2015 in core Europe.

Given the West's increasingly culturally torn and cleft societies, but their continuing economic, technical, and military superiority, what happens *within* a civilization is as crucial to its ability to resist destruction from external sources as it is to holding off internal sources of decay. The West possessed many characteristics that Toynbee and others identified after 1945 as those of a mature civilization on the brink of internal decay. Economically the West was far richer than any other civilization, but it also had low economic growth rates, saving rates, and investment rates, particularly compared with the societies of East Asia. Individual and collective consumption had priority over the creation of the capabilities for future economic and military power. Natural population growth was low, particularly compared with that of Islamic and African countries.

Far more significant than economics and demography, Huntington, like Spengler, Toynbee, and Will Durant before him, identified the related problems of moral decline and cultural suicide. Huntington identified symptoms of Western moral decay in anti-social behaviour, single-parent families, loss of the work ethic, narcissism, and a decline in social trust and educational standards.

More tellingly, Huntington, like Alan Bloom and other conservatives at the time, drew attention to the deracinating danger posed by the progressive ideology of multiculturalism which attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings.

Political elites in various states have, as we have seen, at times attempted to disavow their cultural heritage and shift the identity of their country from one civilization to another. In no case to date have they succeeded. Instead, they created schizophrenic, torn countries. In a similar vein, multiculturalism eschews the West's cultural heritage. However, instead of attempting to identify the United States with another civilization, multiculturalists wish to create a country of many civilizations, which is to say a country not belonging to any civilization and lacking a cultural core. Multiculturalism implicitly envisaged the end of Western civilization. If the United States is de-Westernized, the West would be reduced to Europe and a few lightly populated overseas European settler countries. Without the United States, the West becomes a declining part of the world's population on







a small and inconsequential peninsula at the extremity of the Eurasian land mass of the world continent.<sup>32</sup>

The futures of the United States and of Europe therefore depended upon Americans reaffirming their commitment to Western civilization. ‘Multiculturalism at home threatens the United States and the West’, Huntington wrote, while at the same time, ‘universalism abroad threatens the West and the world’. Both denied the uniqueness of Western culture. ‘The global monoculturalists want to make the world like America. The domestic multiculturalists want to make America like the world.’<sup>33</sup> In the deepening clash of civilizations, Europe and America would hang together or hang separately.

This was the West’s predicament in 1996. Development in the non-West made regionalization the central strategic trend in the post-Cold War world. In this new era, clashes of civilizations represented the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations seemed the surest safeguard against world war.

To maintain world order, Huntington proposed three rules: an *abstention rule*—that core states abstain from intervention in conflicts in other civilizations. This was the first requirement of peace in a multicivilizational, multipolar world. Then there was the *joint mediation rule*—that core states negotiate with each other. The third rule for peace was the *commonalities rule* where peoples in all civilizations should attempt to expand the values, institutions, and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilizations.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Given Huntington’s thesis, how has it stood the test of time? His first two rules, it should be said, have largely been honoured only in the breach. This, however, only reinforces Huntington’s thesis of an inexorable clash between a Greater China and the West, especially since 2012 and the emergence of an increasingly autocratic style of CCP leadership. Xi Jinping’s vision, and his ability to instantiate it, intimates a Pacific Asian order informed by a party-led version of neo-Confucian legalism. It assumes ‘a carefully articulated hierarchical society’ both locally and globally.

Since Huntington wrote, the lineaments of what this vision entails have become more defined. The CCP has consistently maintained its commitment to return the Chinese world to its historic Ming dynasty status and order. Prior to Xi Jinping, however, it lacked the hard economic and military power to achieve this.





The China dream that Xi Jinping announced in 2012 could only be achieved by ‘persistent efforts’, and ‘indomitable will’, ‘to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics’ and achieve ‘the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’. In order ‘to realize the Chinese road, we must spread the Chinese spirit, which combines the spirit of the nation with patriotism as the spirit of the time with reform and innovation as the core’.<sup>34</sup>

Xi’s vision was the latest version of the neo-Confucian ideal of a harmonious world order, unified and rejuvenated by greater China, that has exercised the imagination of both nationalists and communists since the 1930s. It embraces an end-of-history teleology with Chinese characteristics. What gives it credence, of course, is the manner in which China has skilfully negotiated globalization and the liberal, institutional, universalist delusion that gripped the West’s political imagination after 1990. Despite Bill Clinton’s prognostication to the contrary, the CCP was not ‘on the wrong side of history’.

China’s understanding of regionalism assumes a Chinese core operating across its South East Asian periphery. The relationship is one of reciprocity, but failure to respect China invokes the stick of discipline rather than the carrot of investment. In East and South East Asia, the Sinic model follows the five principles of peaceful co-existence via China’s role in the East Asian Summit mechanism. In Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) facilitates China’s claim to be the dominant heartland power on the world continent. Formed in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan formed the embryo of a Eurasian economic and security alliance of autocracies. India and Pakistan acceded to what became the SCO in June 2017. Iran and Afghanistan currently enjoy observer status. In terms of geographic area and comprising 44 per cent of the world’s population, the SCO is the largest multilateral organization in the world. As Tajik Secretary General Rashid Alimov explains, the organization aims to ‘build a just polycentric world order’ by reinforcing ‘equal and indivisible security’.<sup>35</sup> It also strives ‘to stave off the clash of civilizations across its respective regions’. More accurately, it is multilateralism with Chinese characteristics, focused on containing security threats and thereby facilitating China’s ‘peaceful rise’ in a ‘harmonious’ but hierarchical Eurasian world order. As the late prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew observed in 2015, ‘The size of China’s displacement of the world balance is such that the world must find a new balance. It is not possible to pretend that this is just another big player. *This is the biggest player in the history of the world.*’<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, there is nothing in the Party’s genetic make-up that would see it embracing a liberal international order premised on pooled sovereignty and transnational institutions with a remit to interfere in the internal affairs of





member states. Significantly, the most influential European thinkers in the Party's academic and policy circles are conservatives, notably Samuel Huntington himself, Karl Schmitt, and Leo Strauss. Schmittian decisionism facilitated the 2020 national security law that asserted Beijing's ultimate authority over Hong Kong, whilst Huntington's clash thesis reinforces the view that *baizuo* (Woke, progressive) liberalism is self-defeating. The thesis also gives legitimacy to Greater China's regional ambitions.

Elsewhere, Huntington evidently underestimated the likelihood of Russia joining a challenger state alliance with China and Iran, as well as the likelihood of war in Ukraine, despite the cultural fault line running through it. Europe and Russia were demographically mature societies with low birth rates and ageing populations. He argued, erroneously, that 'Such societies do not have the youthful vigour to be expansionist and offensively oriented. Neither Russia nor the West is likely to pose any longer-term security challenge to the other.'<sup>37</sup>

In the cases both of eastern Ukraine and Taiwan, Huntington evidently underestimated the continuing appeal of the values of democracy and self-determination in the face of cultural, religious, and ethnic appeals. It has also been demonstrated, in the case of Ukraine at least, that despite some tergiversation, the West has held together as a NATO-led alliance of democracies.

Huntington's pessimism also ignored the possibility of a resilient and culturally defined Anglosphere, as well as the siren call of the West's values to non-Western but democratic cultures, like India and Japan, that increasingly join with the West in confronting the China challenge. The development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ('the Quad') that established security cooperation among Australia, Japan, India, and the US after 2012, and the AUKUS agreement of 2020 between the US, the UK, and Australia was something Huntington did not foresee and, following his first and second rules for civilizational order, would have advised against.

Turning to the problem of Islam's bloody borders, Huntington's prognosis here was half right and half wrong. The West's clash with a Muslim world promoting an alternative fundamentalist vision to an ignorant *Jabiliya* West (as Islamism's prophet Sayyid Qutb termed it) assumed the questionable shape of a US-led Western War on Terror after 9/11.<sup>38</sup> However, Islamism outside its diasporic European centres became much less of a problem after the collapse of the Islamic State in 2016 and the Trump administration's decision to avoid further Middle Eastern entanglements. Absent Western intervention (which Huntington's first rule advised against), a shared Islamic consciousness, held together by a monolithic and apocalyptic religious vision, was much less evident, or appealing,





than Huntington assumed. In fact, the long-standing historical divide between Sunni and Shiite confessions has merely intensified cultural and territorial tensions between the Gulf States and Iran, whilst Turkey pursues a neo-Ottoman policy in Central Asia. Moreover, whilst non-core Muslim states like Iran and Pakistan have bandwagoned, as Huntington assumed they would, into an alliance of autocracies with China, Turkey and the Gulf States have significantly hedged against such an alliance.

Paradoxically, the Islamist vision of a *Dar al Islam* in Manichean conflict with a *Dar al Harb* maintained its greatest appeal amongst a European diaspora, as Islamic State-inspired attacks in London, Paris, and Berlin after 2012 demonstrated. The fault line with the Muslim world and the impact of illegal and legal migration from the non-West, already a problem in 1996, have thus exacerbated a major cleavage in increasingly divided European societies, as Huntington presciently anticipated.

An academic, bureaucratic, and media-elite preoccupation with Western Islamophobia after 2003 in both Europe and the US intensified the torn and cleft character of the West. Multiculturalism evolved into a politically correct relativism and a moral equivalence concerning even liberal values that has reinforced the decay of Western civilization that Huntington comminated against. Whilst elites checked the rectitude of their progressive value signals, ironically, it was Christianity, rather than Islam, that was increasingly repellent to the post-Western, Woke mind.

The Ukraine war has amongst other things exposed what Sayyid Qutb identified as the hideous schizophrenia at the core of the contemporary Western vision. Whilst advancing an alliance of democracies promoting human rights globally, NGOs and academic, media, and policy elites simultaneously denounce the political and democratic foundations of the West as both colonialist and racist. As Oliver Dowden, the former UK culture secretary pointed out on the eve of the military intervention in Ukraine, a 'painful Woke psychodrama' swept the West at a time when it was facing threats from states such as Russia, challenging the liberal, rule-based, international order. At the precise point 'when our resolve ought to be strongest, a pernicious new ideology is sweeping our societies'. He was correct, but his allegedly conservative government remained in thrall to key beliefs of this culturally destructive ideology.<sup>39</sup>

The owl of Minerva, of course, flies at twilight, and we can now see through the inspissating gloom how we have undermined from within what at the end of the Cold War were the strongest, richest, and most politically successful democracies the world had ever seen. Its destruction was a work of European and later





American post-colonial angst and perversity. Its pernicious assumptions spread from obscure continental philosophy departments to capture the commanding heights of Western academe and transform political, media, business, and financial elites over a thirty-year-long march through the institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Civilizations fail—students of the phenomenon like Huntington have observed—when the religious, intellectual, social, and political elites lose the allegiance of the masses. New quasi-religious movements (anti-racism, anti-biology, and anti-capitalism) begin to sweep society. Such decay precedes the stage of invasion ‘when the civilization, no longer *able* to defend itself because it is no longer *willing* to defend itself, lies wide open’ to barbarian invasion. The barbarian assault on the West came from within and has assumed the character of an increasingly apocalyptic and culturally disfiguring, explicitly anti-Western, ideology virtuously embraced by the West’s political and managerial classes during their inept and economically, politically, and socially self-destructive response to a virus made in China.

As Leo Strauss observed presciently and in a different ideological context, ‘the crisis of the West consists in the West having become uncertain of its purpose. The West was once certain of its purpose—of a purpose in which all men could be united and hence it had a clear vision of its future [...]. We do no longer have that certainty and that clarity. Some among us even despair of the future, and this despair explains many forms of western degradation.’<sup>40</sup>

A society accustomed to understanding itself in terms of a universal and progressive purpose cannot lose faith in that purpose without becoming utterly bewildered. The relativist and critical approaches that have come to dominate the social sciences since the 1990s are a reflection of that bewilderment, give comfort and coherence to the West’s enemies, reinforce our bewildering loss of purpose and receive state-funded grants to promote it.

The rhetoric of emancipation, denial of gender, climate apocalypse, and decolonization of the West’s political foundations has taken hold of the bureaucratic levers that manage the population in depth and detail. In the name of abstract communities, a barbarian class exposes and denounces the West’s past, in the name of fluid notions of justice, morality, and an inclusive, but diverse, future. It constructs a rhetorical cloak that masks the will to power, undermining a traditional structure of beliefs and practices. It replaces it with another based on rewarding minorities with defined quotas in the social, political, and economic spheres of society, at the expense of careers open to talent—the foundation of





the West's innovative success. Privileging abstract minorities and inducting them into a post-Western elite facilitates the assault on the foundations of Western civilization, redescribing its achievements in the arts, sciences, the rule of law, and democracy as either racist, or patriarchal, or both.

Somewhat misguidedly, we are apt to think of a civilization as something solid and external. Yet at bottom it is, as Michael Oakeshott wrote, 'a collective dream'. What a people dreams in this earthly sleep is its civilization. And the substance of this dream is a myth, an imaginative interpretation of human existence, the perception (not the solution) of the mystery of human life. 'The office of literature in a civilisation is not to break the dream, but to recall it, to recreate it in each generation, and even to make more articulate the dream-powers of a people. We, whose participation in the dream is imperfect and largely passive, are, in a sense, its slaves. But the comparative freedom of the artist springs not from any faculty of wakefulness (not from any opposition to the dream), but from his power to dream more profoundly. And it is that which distinguishes him from the scientist, whose perverse genius is to dream that he is awake.'<sup>41</sup>

The project of rationalist pseudo-science in its Woke manifestation is to solve the mystery, to wake us from our dream, to destroy the myth. Were this project fully achieved, not only should we find ourselves awake in a profound darkness, but a dreadful insomnia would settle upon the West, not less intolerable for being only a nightmare.

A Woke vision now defines the lineaments of this nightmare that leads to the worrying conclusion that it may be 'closing time in the gardens of the West, and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair'.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993); Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* (Summer 1989); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Huntington also acknowledged the possibility of a distinctive Japanese, Latin American, and a potential African civilization. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 28. See also Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>6</sup> The editor of *The National Interest*, Owen Harries, and the intellectual architect of containment, George Kennan, spring to mind. See Cyril Connolly, Tom Switzer, and Sue Windybank, eds, *Prudence and Power. The Writings of Owen Harries* (Sydney: Connor Court, 2022), 132.





- <sup>7</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 151.
- <sup>8</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 161.
- <sup>9</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 65.
- <sup>10</sup> The title of Benjamin Barber's book. Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld. How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Crown, 1995).
- <sup>11</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 111–112.
- <sup>12</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 191.
- <sup>13</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 170.
- <sup>14</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 172.
- <sup>15</sup> Carl Schmitt, 'The New *Nomos* of the Earth', in *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003).
- <sup>16</sup> See Eric Hendriks-Kim, 'Why China Loves Conservatives', *First Things* (January 2023), 15.
- <sup>17</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 138.
- <sup>18</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 139.
- <sup>19</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 139.
- <sup>20</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 138.
- <sup>21</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 141.
- <sup>22</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 231.
- <sup>23</sup> Cited in Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 195.
- <sup>24</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 88.
- <sup>25</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 187.
- <sup>26</sup> Lawrence Freeman, 'Great Powers, Vital Interests and Nuclear Weapons', *Survival* (Winter 1994), 15.
- <sup>27</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 199.
- <sup>28</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 201.
- <sup>29</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 199.
- <sup>30</sup> Jean-Marie Domenach quoted in Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 200.
- <sup>31</sup> Myron Weiner, *The Global Migration Crisis: Challenge to States and to Human Rights* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995), 21.
- <sup>32</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 307.
- <sup>33</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 305.
- <sup>34</sup> Xi Jinping's Speech to 18th China National Party Congress, 2012, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586), accessed 28 January 2023.
- <sup>35</sup> Rashid Alimov, 'The Extensive Agenda of the SCO Is Extremely Positive', *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20181028/477920.html>, accessed 28 January 2023.
- <sup>36</sup> Cited in Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 231. (Emphasis added.)
- <sup>37</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 242.
- <sup>38</sup> The description is that of Sayyid Qutb in *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundation, 1960), 35.
- <sup>39</sup> See report on Oliver Dowden's speech given to the Heritage Foundation: Rowena Mason, 'Tory Party Chairman Says "Painful Woke Psychodrama" Weakening the West', *The Guardian* (14 February 2022), [www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/14/oliver-dowden-says-painful-woke-psychodrama-weakening-the-west](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/14/oliver-dowden-says-painful-woke-psychodrama-weakening-the-west).
- <sup>40</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 33.
- <sup>41</sup> Michael Oakeshott, 'Leviathan: A Myth', in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 150–154.
- <sup>42</sup> Connolly, Switzer, and Windybank, eds, *Prudence and Power. The Writings of Owen Harries*, 33.

